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ABSTRACT

This bulletin describes the New York City Children's Community Workshop School, the school being founded on the premise that children learn best through concrete activities which relate to the experiences of everyday life. Serving a mixed racial population of Black, Puerto Rican and caucasian students, the students (five and one-half to 11 years old) represent an economic balance of two-thirds disadvantaged and one-third privileged. Classes are ungraded and parent participation is stressed. (KG)

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Center for Urban Education

Program Conspectus

105 Madison Ave., New York City 10016 ■ Prepared by the Program Reference Service ■ ■ ■ 212-889-7277

Program: Children's Community Workshop School

Location: New York City

Date Started: September 1968

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

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Scope: 65 students, 5½-11 years old, were enrolled for the 1968-69 school year; 1/3 were black, 1/3 were "Hispanic", 1/3 were white. An economic balance was maintained by taking "1/3 from the privileged and 2/3 from the disadvantaged." In 1969-70, 95 children are enrolled; the racial and economic balance is maintained.

Staff: For 1969-70 the school employs: 1 administrator, an assistant; 1 clerk-typist; 6 teachers; 2-4 parents (at any given time) as teacher aides; and 2-8 student teachers. The school intends to make extensive use of curriculum consultants during the year.

Special Materials, Equipment, & Facilities: The program stresses the use of enrichment materials and a wide variety is available. Many things were made at home by the children and a number of teacher-made materials are used, including such items as puppet stages and word charts.

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Description of Activities:

The Children's Community Workshop School was created by a group of parents and other community members who felt that the public schools had failed both to "integrate effectively" (R1,p.99) and to establish a curriculum which is realistic and relevant to everyday experiences." (R1,p.99) The school was originally set up in a basement rented from a community youth hostel, and in 3 storefronts made available by New York City. The basement housed kindergarten and 1st grade; grades 2 and 3 occupied 1 storefront; grades 4, 5, and 6 occupied another; and the 3rd was used as an administrative office and storeroom. In September 1969 the Community Workshop moved into a brownstone rented from the city for $5 per month. The youth hostel facilities were retained. Parents and staff worked on the renovations during the summer.

The school has modeled its curriculum on the "British Infant School theory that children learn best through concrete experiences and at their own pace." (R1,p.99) In addition to two full-time teachers and several student teachers (from local universities), each classroom often has parents, and teachers from other schools, giving the children individual attention. "Classrooms are ungraded, and we do no tracking or ability grouping." (R2,p7). Children move freely about the classroom from one activity to another. Teachers work with the children individually and in small groups going from one to another, responding to the students when they ask for help, advice, or praise. The classrooms are filled with storybooks of all kinds, word charts, and self-pacing reading kits; art equipment and puppet stages; balances, weights, scales, and objects for counting; magnets, compasses, thermometers, and other science equipment.

One observer comments upon the bustle of activity:

> Coming into one room, we were struck by the diversity and earnestness of the youngsters' occupation -- some reading (a few of these with the help of the teacher), some playing games (checkers, etc.), one boy working with a saw on some stiff cardboard amid some construction materials, several children working on paintings and costumes and self-decoration for Halloween celebration,....(R4,p.1)

Another observer notes that in one room:

> A teacher was demonstrating to a small group of boys several concepts about magnetism and electricity, and their relationship to electric motors. The boys seemed very interested, and several took the opportunity to examine the parts of an electric fan and a small motor. There followed an informal discussion of what they had observed. Throughout all of this time, one girl sat reading by herself, quite content, absorbed in her book, and apparently undistracted by the activity that swirled around her. (R3,p.4)

Evaluation:

No standardized tests were or will be administered. The school will be evaluated this year "through the use of a climate study and through tests specifically designed for our program to avoid stereotypes." (R5,p.4)

Nine members of CCNY's Educational Clinic visited the CCWS in November 1968 and made the following comments:

> We were excited by being in a school which means what it says about children directing their learning and curriculum, and about classrooms being child, not teacher, oriented. We were impressed by the high level of motivation of the children, and by the natural self-control displayed by the children. We were impressed by the awareness of the teachers, and their ability to be there when needed, to direct next steps when children needed direction, to help children express feeling but not to interfere with the freedom of other children. Within the relatively unstructured atmosphere, there was obvious structure and order, and a great deal of learning was going on.
>
> The school has problems..problems of space, equipment, financing, largely, and also problems among older children whose past schooling has been so different, in helping them to relearn how to be self-directing. Parents, teachers, and administrators are really working together as a decision-making body. (R3,p.4-5)

In summarizing the accomplishments of its first year, the school states:

> We have seen children learn to live together and learn together. We have seen children who had forgotten remember that learning can be fun. We have seen children teach each other, and teach us. We have seen children grow emotionally, socially, and intellectually, each in his own way and as he most needed to grow. (R2,p.13)

Budget:

The school raised by its own efforts, $85,000 for the year 1968-69; $40,000 was a grant from the Arca Foundation; the balance was received in small amounts from various other organizations and individuals in the community.

CCWS is now trying to raise the necessary funds for the 1969-70 school year. Their proposed budget of $271,100 is broken down as follows: professional salaries, $113,500; consultants, $19,950; resource center, $18,000; parent coordinator, $6,000; community organizer, $8,000; community aides, $4,300; office staff, $19,000; maintenance, $6,500; rent, renovations, utilities, and furnishings, $21,860; supplies and equipment, $18,500; insurance, travel and lunches, $16,025; and medical and employee benefits, $19,525. The school has set a minimum cost per pupil of $1,200.

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